

# Carroll History Journal

Historical Society of Carroll County, Maryland

## 3 MILES 94 PERCHES: THE MECHANICSVILLE & FINKSBURG TURNPIKE

By Johnny Johnsson

Introduction by Mary Ann Ashcraft

### INTRODUCTION

"I do not think there can be a road in the State that is . . . in as bad condition and that is as badly worked." These words, penned to the editor of Westminster's *American Sentinel* in 1881, referred to the public road connecting Westminster and New Windsor. The writer described sections he felt were particularly deplorable. "The next part I will name is between Wakefield and Cassell's old mill. Eight or ten years ago, whoever worked that part, rolled in what we call bull eye stone about the size of a peck measure and there they have been ever since and will stay there until the end of time unless removed, as they will never wear off the eighth of an inch in a hundred years. At a small culvert near the new Bridge recently erected opposite Mr. Jas. H. Richardson's residence is a . . . stone two and a half feet square and 6 inches above ground, right where the wheels strike unless your horse can jump over it, in which event you can escape it."

Carroll County's roads were probably no worse than those

in other parts of Maryland, although the writer might not have traveled widely enough to make comparisons. As early as 1666 the colonial Assembly had assigned road building and maintenance to each county's government and two hundred years later the counties still had not developed the infrastructure to handle the daunting task.

Waterways, which were Maryland's first "roads," didn't serve anyone journeying into the back country. It was the trails established by Native Americans or early settlers traveling on foot or horseback that eventually became roads when they were widened to accommodate wagons. In the eighteenth century, settlers were appointed to

oversee and maintain county roads near their rural homes, but they couldn't manage anything as expensive or labor-intensive as surfacing and grading them. When the United States experienced a dramatic expansion of industry and agriculture following the Revolution, poor roads quickly grew worse. Everyone

LIBERTY <sup>MD</sup> NEW WINDSOR	
TURNPIKE ROAD Co.	
GATE No. 1	
RATES OF TOLL FROM NEW WINDSOR	
FOR	TO
Every Score of Sheep & Hogs	(20) 1 - 1 3 - 6 4 - 8 8 - 16
" " Cattle	(20) 1 - 2 6 - 12 8 - 16 16 - 32
" Horse, rode or led	1 - 1 2 - 3 2 - 4 4 - 8
" Chair or Chaise	1 Horse & 2 Wheels 1 - 1 4 - 7 4 - 8 8 - 16

A portion of the original signpost at Gate No. 1 of the Liberty and New Windsor Turnpike. Its construction began about 1868.  
Courtesy of New Windsor Museum.

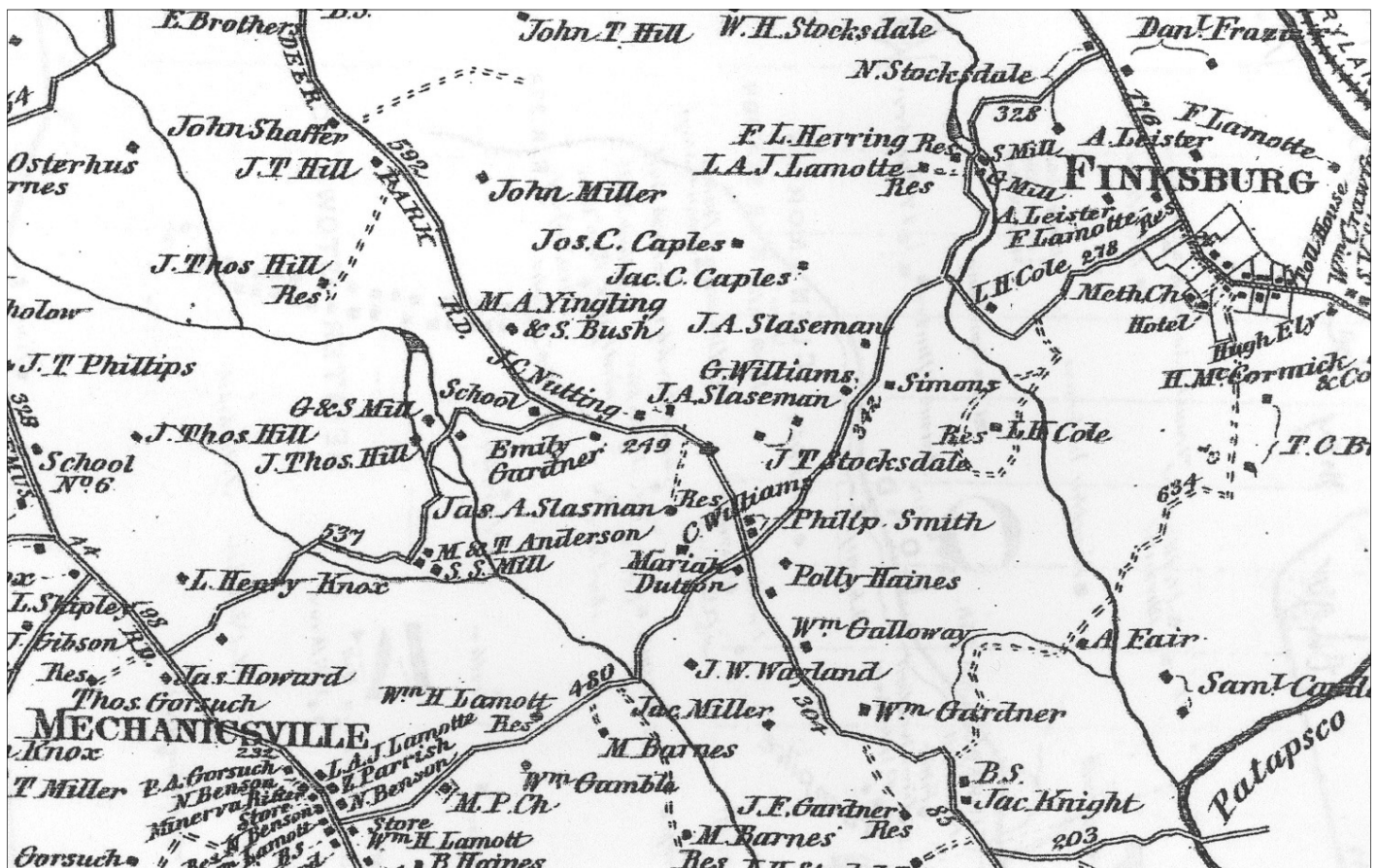
was traveling: drovers moved sheep or cattle; people rode on horseback; stagecoaches and farm wagons plied the countryside. With that kind of traffic, roads which were relatively smooth and hard-packed in July became nearly impassable after winter snow and spring rain.

During the late 1820s and early 1830s, some Marylanders were so desperate for good roads they began using the graded surface between the new Baltimore and Ohio railroad tracks to move their animals and carts. B&O officials wanted the legislature to outlaw the practice, but the introduction of locomotives to pull cars (instead of horses) eventually forced the trespassers off the tracks.

Capitalism came to the rescue at the beginning of the nineteenth century as people realized that privately funded turnpike companies could build better roads and also make money for investors. An 1823

drawing showed three turnpikes leading out of Baltimore toward present-day Carroll County. The privately-owned Baltimore and Reisterstown Turnpike, begun about 1805, forked at Reisterstown with one branch heading to Hanover, Pa., and the other to Westminster. The Liberty Turnpike went from Baltimore to Libertytown; and the Baltimore and Frederick Town Turnpike followed a more southerly route. Carroll was crisscrossed by other turnpikes as well. The Westminster, Taneytown and Emmitsburg Turnpike began as a plank road about 1815 with wood covering a roadbed of crushed stone; a less elaborate turnpike connected Liberty to New Windsor. Ninety percent of Maryland's turnpikes were built in Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick, and Washington counties.

Tolls were collected at various locations along the turnpikes by toll keepers who "turned" a long "pike" to open or shut the roads to traffic. Some evidence of local turnpikes still exists. A sign from the



A portion of Woolery election district showing the turnpike from Mechanicsville to Finksburg as it appeared in An Illustrated Atlas of Carroll County, 1877. From the Historical Society's collection.

Liberty and New Windsor Turnpike Road Company shows its toll rates; a bridge over Sams Creek stands on a remnant of the same toll road; and a number of former tollhouses now function only as private dwellings.

Turnpikes didn't solve all the problems and didn't reach every town. They required significant amounts of capital for their initial construction and, once finished, they had to be maintained. After a few years of wood rot and freeze/thaw, they deteriorated significantly. Sometimes there wasn't sufficient income (or proper oversight) to replace rotten planks, add more crushed stone, or repair the "breakers" which diverted water runoff on steep grades. Throughout the nineteenth century, most of Carroll's roads were marginally maintained and many were in downright poor condition. Finally in 1908 the State Roads Commission was established by a governor who had campaigned on a "good roads platform." Maryland began building all-weather roads to connect every county seat throughout the state. The project was long overdue.

A group of men living near the Baltimore County line envisioned one of the turnpikes built in Carroll County during the last quarter of the 19th century. Recognizing the need to improve a steep and heavily used stretch of road between Mechanicsville and Finksburg, they seized the opportunity to build a turnpike three miles and ninety-four perches long.

## TURNPIKE BEGINNINGS

One of a number of short toll roads to appear in Maryland counties in the late nineteenth century, the Mechanicsville and Finksburg Turnpike Company of Carroll County was incorporated on April 9, 1870, by eleven men living in the vicinity of the proposed route. At the time Mechanicsville was the name of the small village now known as Gamber. However, its name appears as Pleasantville on the 1862 Simon J. Martenet Map of Carroll County. The stated object and purpose of the corporation was "the building or making of a Turnpike Road from Mechanicsville on the Nichodemus Road to Finksburg not exceeding six miles in length." The intent was to run on the bed of the existing county road where practicable and to make a good turnpike with as light a grade as

possible. Furthermore, the company planned to start charging tolls according to state law after one mile of the roadway had been completed.

The incorporators organized the company for a period of 40 years with the business to be carried on in Finksburg. They set the level of capitalization at \$12,000, composed of 600 shares of stock with a \$20 par value per share, and declared that the company should be managed by five directors. The first directors were Moses Barnes, John T. Stocksdales, Mahlon Slasman, Lewis P. G. Gorsuch, and Lewis A. J. Lamotte. The remaining organizers were Christopher C. Williams, Lewis H. Knox, Joseph E. Ward, and three Gorsuches: Elias A., Lovelace G., and William.

Landholders along the line of the proposed turnpike further agreed in June of 1870 to allow construction of the road across their parcels of land and for it to be up to 40 feet wide. The 20 signatories to this instrument were:

Lewis A. J. Lamotte	Philip Smith
John T. Stocksdales	Mary A. Haines
Amanda C. Shipley	George W. Horner
Moses Barnes	Francis Lamotte
Benjamin Haines	Abraham Leister
Christopher C. Williams	Jacob Caple
Peter A. Shipley	Jacob W. Caple
Maria Dutton	Daniel Frazier
Hannah Smith	William H. Lamotte
Robert Williams	T. Poultney

Notice how this list differs from that of the original incorporators and directors: seven of the original men (five Gorsuches, Ward and Knox) did not actually own land along the chosen turnpike route. Did these people see an investment possibility, a chance to secure improved transportation for themselves and the community, or did they think the route might eventually pass through their property? Several of the landowners were not literate and had to sign an "X" for their name on the agreement. One of these was Maria(h) Dutton who appears on the 1877 *Illustrated Atlas of Carroll County*. According to area resident Gary Brauning, the Duttons were a local black family living at "The Crossroads," the

## TOLL RATES

We still know relatively little of the specific operational details of the Mechanicsville and Finksburg Turnpike, but facts concerning other nearby roads are informative. According to George Horvath, a former Fourth District Assistant Chief with the State Highway Administration, Deer Park Road was actually a very old road dating at least to colonial times, and perhaps earlier as a ridgetop Indian trail known as "George Ogg's Road to the Falls." Captain John Stevenson patented the 2,513-acre "Stevenson's Deer Park and Troutng Stream" in 1754, the origin of the Deer Park name. Deer Park Road continued over the North Branch of the Patapsco into Baltimore County, through Soldiers Delight and eventually intersected the Liberty Turnpike. A similar small toll road was established in 1868 as the Deer Park Turnpike Road Company of Baltimore County. Extracts from the

organizing act of this contemporary toll road provide some of the typical toll rates and practices of the period that might have been similar to those on the Mechanicsville and Finksburg pike. Once a section of road was completed, the Company was authorized to appoint toll gatherers "to collect and receive of and from all and every person or persons using the said road the tolls and rates hereinafter mentioned, and to stop any person riding, leading or driving any horses, mares or geldings, cattle, sheep, hogs, sulky, chaise, chair, phaeton, coach, coaches, cart, wagon, wain, sled or other carriage of pleasure or burthen, from passing through the said gate until they shall have paid the same."

Proportioned over ten-mile lengths and by number, those driving livestock would pay tolls "for every score of sheep, ten cents; for every score of hogs, ten cents; for every score of cattle, twenty cents; for every

horse, mule, mare or gelding which may pass through the toll-gate, whether lead or ridden, or whether driven, attached to a vehicle of pleasure or of burthen, the sum of one cent for every mile, and in that proportion for any greater distance traveled unless the vehicle drawn shall have a tire over three inches and one-half in width, in which case one-half the above rate shall be charged; provided, however, that no less than one-half cent shall be charged per horse or mule for passing through said gate." Furthermore, the Deer Park Turnpike Act declared that two oxen were equivalent to one horse, and that a mule was equal to one horse as well. Similar toll rates are evident from a sign for Gate No. 1 of the Liberty and New Windsor Turnpike Road Company. Heavier vehicles and larger livestock were charged more, just as trucks pay higher fees on today's toll routes to compensate for additional wear and tear.

local name given to the intersection with Deer Park Road halfway along the turnpike route. The Duttons were treated fairly by some residents, but experienced discrimination from others involved in the local Ku Klux Klan.

## THE TURNPIKE ROUTE

This crucial agreement was not recorded until December 12, 1870, but by then included a surveyed route from Mechanicsville to Finksburg composed of 52 courses starting from Nicodemus Road and ending at the Westminster Branch of the Baltimore and Reisterstown Turnpike Road, then known as the Westminster Pike. The total surveyed length was 3 miles and 94 perches. A perch, also known as a rod or pole, equals 16½ feet, making the road 3 miles and 1,551 feet long, just under 3.3 miles. Today, Route 91 measures about 3.2 miles on current maps or by car odometer. The turnpike route differed from the old county road in its approach to Finksburg up

the grade from Beaver Run. In 1840, a road known as Road No. 114 was surveyed a length of more than 3¼ miles by William Whalen. Its route ran from Pleasantville to a location about one-half mile west of Finksburg on the Westminster Pike. From Beaver Creek it followed the present-day Hughes Road to the rather steep grade of Kays Mill Road. The only route shown on the 1862 map reveals the old road climbing up the steep hill from Beaver Run to the current Bloom Road off Route 140 in Finksburg. One can still see its narrow trace when the leaves are off the trees. The 1877 atlas clearly shows the turnpike route as well as the road along the creek to the saw and grist mills near Lewis Lamotte's residence.

## TURNPIKE FINANCES AND OPERATIONS

By February of 1871 development of the turnpike enterprise was progressing with the hauling and placement of stone. Completing the first mile in



1874 Mechanicsville & Finksburg Turnpike Stock  
 June 24 Paid L. A. Lamotte \$100. Subscr. 100;

Entry showing the Mineral Hill Mining Company's subscription for \$100 in stock in the Mechanicsville & Finksburg Turnpike in 1874. From Proceedings of the Mineral Hill Mining Company, 1858-1881. Courtesy of the author.

order to be able to charge tolls was no doubt an incentive. On March 4th the company held a meeting of stockholders chaired by President Lewis A. J. Lamotte. By unanimous vote more than two-thirds of the stockholders represented decided to reduce the capitalization to \$6,000, as only \$733.87 had been paid into the company treasury. The stockholders met again at the Old Providence Church near Mechanicsville, in person and by proxy, on August 29, 1874, but voted this time to increase the capitalization to \$8,000, as the treasury had accumulated \$4,481.97. Some of these funds were undoubtedly stock subscriptions of persons or entities interested in the turnpike, such as the Mineral Hill Mining Company located south of Mechanicsville near Louisville. The mining company paid a \$240 subscription in 1873, followed by another \$100 in 1874.

By 1870 Mineral Hill was yielding a higher proportion of iron ores than copper ores and was shipping to several iron furnaces. Teamsters hauled ore either to the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in Sykesville or to the Western Maryland Railroad in Finksburg. Prior to 1868, most of Mineral Hill's iron ore was consumed at James W. Tyson's Elba Furnace just south of Sykesville. Copper ore was worth much more, but the mine could break even on iron ore or even make a small profit if transportation costs were reasonable. One large customer was the Ashland Iron Furnace near Cockeysville, located on the Northern Central Railroad. To ship iron ore to Ashland, heavy teaming wagons would travel from Mineral Hill to Finksburg Station to access the Western Maryland line, which had a connection to the Greenspring Valley Branch of the Northern Central. The mine also required various operating supplies, and local names associated with the turnpike such as Gorsuch, Stocksdales, and Shipley

appear as suppliers or haulers in the mining company ledger. One can appreciate the importance of easy grades, a good road, and solid bridges to wagons loaded down with heavy ores or mining equipment.

The next legal document involving the turnpike appeared more than a decade later. The company needed money to pay off some indebtedness and improve its road. It petitioned the General Assembly during the January 1886 session for the authority to borrow money through the issuance of promissory notes or bonds secured by mortgages on its property. The Act was adopted on March 18. On June 26, 1886, President Lewis A. J. Lamotte and the board of directors met to discuss their options at the company's office, now located in Mechanicsville. They passed a resolution authorizing Lamotte to negotiate a \$600 loan for eight months.

On July 21, 1886, the turnpike company mortgaged its property, including the toll road, toll houses, and tollgates, to Lamotte's brother William H. Lamotte to secure a \$600 loan with interest. Shortly thereafter, he assigned the mortgage back to Lewis for value received, probably \$600 or its equivalent given in return. After Lewis's sudden death in 1890, the mortgage was assigned to Joshua W. Williams, Nicholas Benson, and Lewis H. Knox by Lamotte's widow Alice and her two sons, Herschel F. Lamotte and Lewis H. Lamotte. William H. Gardner, who attested to this transaction, had purchased the Greenbury Williams farm along the turnpike route at auction with financial help from Lamotte. Gardner's home farm located on Deer Park Road was owned later by the Fords and now belongs to the Braunings. The interactions and business transactions between these men illustrate the level of commercial activity involving real estate near the turnpike route.

## THE LAMOTTES' ROLE

It is evident that the Lamottes were heavily involved in the turnpike from Mechanicsville to Finksburg: brothers Lewis A. J. and William H. Lamotte were major landowners along the route and influential members of the community. The Lamottes' early interest in transportation reveals itself in a newspaper account of a meeting held in 1859 in which Lewis's older brother George W. Lamotte joined him and other interested parties in an attempt to organize a railroad from Deer Park Chapel to intersect the new Western Maryland Railroad line. Furthermore, George was supervisor of the Baltimore and Reisterstown Turnpike for several years including its 12-mile branch to Westminster where he resided. The Lamotte family had several distinct lineages in Carroll County, but the author has not been able to locate descendants who know about the turnpike. The Abraham Lamotte family emigrated from York County, Pennsylvania. Another Finksburg Lamotte, Francis, was an agent and agricultural implement dealer from York with business headquarters in Baltimore, in addition to being a farmer. Another line of Lamottes settled near Hampstead and ran a hotel there.

Lewis A. J. Lamotte's farm and house were adjacent to Beaver Run along the portion of the turnpike that crossed the creek and turned to make the long climb to Finksburg. It was here that the second tollgate was located. Lamotte built the house that tollkeeper Herod Tilghman occupied in 1880. Tilghman and his family appear on the 1880 census, where his occupation is listed as "stone braker."

Maintaining the roadbed by breaking and spreading rocks and filling ruts, particularly on steep sections subject to washout and erosion, was a necessary turnpike task. A poorly kept roadbed could result in broken axles and mired wagons. An examination of local sunken roadbeds reveals chunks of broken rocks and distinct white quartz used for just such a purpose. A loaded heavy wagon could hold about two perches of broken stone weighing some 2½ tons. (Like the linear measurement, a perch of stone is a volume 16½ feet long, 18 inches high, and 12 inches thick.) Turnpike laborers and quarry workers were

paid by the perch for the amount quarried, broken, transported, or placed on the roadbed.

Lewis A. J. Lamotte's prominence in the community is further evident in the 1877 atlas, which shows him holding property in Mechanicsville, possibly a business interest. He operated a corn-canning business and ran Finksburg Station for many years, employing such assistants as E. Everett Harden of Mechanicsville. He served for a time as Master of the Finksburg Grange 143, Order of the Patrons of Husbandry, and was Treasurer of the Independent Order of Mechanics. He was selected to be a County School Commissioner from 1868-1870 and elected to one term in the Maryland House of Delegates in 1872 as a Democrat. In 1880 Lamotte was a member of the Committee of Reception of the Carroll County Agricultural Society, the group that sponsored the growing county fair. He was a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, an earnest friend of temperance, and is buried in the Providence Methodist Protestant Church cemetery.

William H. Lamotte's home place was located about a half-mile down the hill from Mechanicsville on the north side of the road before it crossed Middle Run. He lived on a portion of "Buck's Forest" that his father Abraham had acquired. This is where the first tollgate of the turnpike was located. The accompanying tollhouse, located across the road on the south side, lasted well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The realignment and widening of Route 91 in the 1960s and later development erased such features. Lamotte appears to have had a store on the southeast corner in Mechanicsville according to the 1877 atlas. He also served as a Register of Voters for the Fourth (Woolery) Election District. The Lamotte name is creatively retained as Claymotte Ridge, now the site of Donovan Construction Company.

The Hardens were also prominent members of the community. Nicholas L. F. Harden not only farmed the land but sold certain supplies to the Mineral Hill Mine. Later he had a "flint" quarry on his farm and removed hundreds of tons of fine quality, white quartz that were shipped to the Maryland Silicate Mills in Finksburg for processing into various pottery, abrasive sandpaper, or filler products. Flint

was another of the local mineral products from the late 1800s that likely traveled the turnpike route. John P. Brauning also had a sizeable flint quarry on Bollinger Mill Road that supplied the same mill. Remnants of other small quartz pits exist near Deer Park Road and throughout the Liberty Reservoir watershed.

In 1928, Maryland Geological Survey economic geologist Joseph Singewald commented, "The grade of the roads is an important factor. Hauls over steep roads are far more expensive than over more level roads since the loads must be much lighter. Where an improved road is available the cost is lower than over a dirt road which during a part of the year may even be almost impassable for heavy teams. The rapid construction and extension of the system of improved roads is of immense value in making available flint deposits that otherwise would be of no value on account of their inaccessible locations." He understood well the economic importance of well-maintained roads to the transportation of many materials and products.

### THE TURNPIKE'S DEMISE

The final reference to the Mechanicsville and Finksburg Turnpike is a copybook letter from Mineral Hill Mine President James W. Tyson:

March 27<sup>th</sup> [1]900

Mr Herschel F La Motte. Sumpter, Oregon

Dear Sir

Your fav<sup>r</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> rec<sup>d</sup>. My day for going into new enterprises has passed! but glad to hear from you again & hope you may draw in your million.

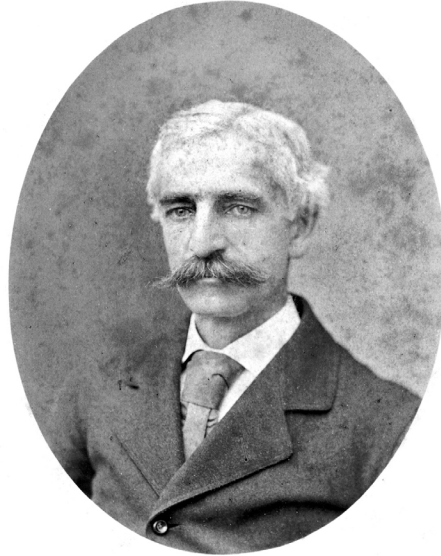
Think your father told me I was largest stockholder in the great turnpike from Finks<sup>b</sup> to Mechanicstown. Can you tell me who to apply to for information about that road?

Perhaps you could have found gold at Mineral Hill! Some has been found there.

Yours truly,

Ja<sup>s</sup> W Tyson

It appears that the destiny of "the great turnpike" was not anything close to a gold mine, yet it surely served its purpose in helping move people, animals,



James W. Tyson (1828–1900), president of the Mineral Hill Mining Company. Courtesy of Howard Kidder.

crops, ores, and other products across the Woolery District of Carroll County to major turnpikes and

railroads. The little-known toll road was absorbed into the state roads system during the early twentieth century as were other turnpikes of the day. Using tax-derived funds, improvements such as concrete paving to handle heavier traffic and regular maintenance of bridges became more feasible. The State Roads Commission acquired the Baltimore and Liberty Turnpike in 1910 and bought the Westminster Branch of the Baltimore and Reisterstown Turnpike in 1915 for \$1,350 per mile.

March 27<sup>th</sup> 900  
Mr Herschel F La Motte. Sumpter, Oregon.  
Dear Sir  
Your fav<sup>r</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> rec<sup>d</sup>? My day for going into new enterprises has passed! but glad to hear from you again & hope you may draw in your million.  
Think your father told me I was largest stockholder in the great turnpike from Finks<sup>b</sup> to Mechanicstown. Can you tell me who to apply to for information about that road?  
Perhaps you could have found gold at Mineral Hill! Some has been found there.  
Yours truly,  
J W Tyson

Letter from James Tyson to Herschel LaMotte dated March 27, 1900. Courtesy of the author.

Maryland Geological Survey topographic maps from 1906 and 1912 and the 1916 *Atlas of Carroll County* all refer to the Mechanicsville and Finksburg Turnpike as the “Gamber Turnpike.” The 1928 Carroll County Geological Map labels the route “Gamber Road.” Portions of Old Gamber Road, former stretches of the turnpike, still exist today. One segment is a private driveway north of Deer Park Road near the Carroll County Tack Shop. Labeled “Old Finksburg Road” on the tax map, the private driveway connects to Hughes Road near the bridge crossing Beaver Run. Other parts of Old Gamber Road near Cold Saturday Farm (Lewis H. Cole’s “Clover Hill” during the Turnpike days), while not part of the original turnpike route, were also replaced by Route 91 in the early 1960s. The once-familiar name of Mechanicsville is preserved only in the name of the local elementary school.

## Key Sources

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Belva LaMotte, “Descendants of Francis LaMotte” and oral communication.

James W. Tyson to Herschel F. La Motte, Letter, Mar. 27, 1900, James W. Tyson Letterbook, p. 225.



A portion of the turnpike route as it appeared on a winter day in January 2009. Courtesy of the author.

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